

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF APRIL 15, 2021 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Pepperell: Ken Hartlage; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman, Martha Morgan

NPS: Emma Lord

MA F&W: Anne Gagnon

Guests:

Warren Kimball (NRWA Director and former MA DEP)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. Due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic the meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

Administrative

The minutes of the March 18, 2021 meeting were approved as amended.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that the Council's Budget and Work Plan for fiscal year 2022 has been submitted for next level review by the NPS. She expects to have confirmation of approval by May or June.

Financial Updates

NRWA Invoice: Elizabeth reported that she had submitted an invoice in the amount of \$9,327.44 for NRWA services in March, for which Lucy confirmed she had authorized payment.

Consultant Invoice: Elizabeth reported on receipt of an invoice dated April 1, 2021 in the amount of \$15,000 from the FLP project consultant, Janet Morrison, which was the total amount allowed under Janet's contract. The FLP Steering Committee recommended payment, which the Council then authorized.

FLP Appraisals: In order to determine a funding request for the FLP application, restricted appraisals must be done on properties to be included in the application. The FLP had estimated it would need \$45,000 to cover appraisals on approximately 30 properties. Elizabeth reported that an application to the Fields Pond Foundation had been filed requesting \$15,000 which would cover up to 10 properties (assuming an average cost of \$1,500 per restricted appraisal). Lucy added that she had recently reached out to her contact at the Foundation and learned a decision on the application should be expected in the next week or so. Elizabeth reported that MA DCR had FY21 Forest Legacy project development funds that could be used for remaining restricted appraisals, albeit on a reimbursable basis. Therefore, the Council will need to front the cost of these restricted appraisals (approximately \$30,000) as contracted services from this year's budget.

Contracts Budget: Summarizing the status of funds in the "contract basket", Elizabeth reported that there are sufficient funds remaining in this year's budget line item to cover fronting the appraisals (\$30,000), Community Grants (\$20,000), Janet's current invoice (\$15,000), anticipated NRWA staff FLP-related costs

through June, and the recommended 2nd contract with Janet (\$15,000 – see below) through the end of the fiscal year.

Community Grant Applications

Lucy opened the discussion on the seven grant applications we had received. One, a Turtle Survey in Nashua, NH, was disqualified not only because it was outside the designated Wild & Scenic sections of the Nashua River, but also because it was focused on Salmon Brook, a tributary of the Merrimack River.

Lucy explained that she had asked Warren Kimball to modify a ranking chart used by the Missisquoi-Trout Rivers Wild & Scenic Committee for us to use in assessing and comparing the remaining six grant applications. She then led the Council members through a review and discussion of the merits of each application, including funding requests and match. The Council agreed that all six applications merited funding; unfortunately, the total amount requested (\$26,806) exceeded the amount available for this program (\$20,000). After a lengthy discussion on the allocation of funds, the Council agreed on the following awards and funding levels:

- Ayer Conservation Commission – Signage Along Ayer Waterways: \$4,800
- Bolton Conservation Commission – Forbush Mill/Still River Trail: \$2,550
- Brookline Conservation Commission – Nissitissit River Tree Project: \$3,300
- Pepperell Select Board – Invasive Plant Advisory Committee Start-up: \$4,000
- Town of Townsend – Adams Dam/River Bank Stabilization: \$3,850
- Townsend Historical Society – Spaulding Coopersage Preservation & Stabilization: \$1,500

Land Stewardship Committee Update

Consultant Services: As noted at previous Council meetings, from the outset there was a high likelihood that the consultant services being provided by Janet Morrison to the FLP project under the contract dated February 18, 2021 would need to be increased. And, as noted above, the Council has received an invoice from Janet on April 1st for the full amount of the contract. A second contract, for the same amount of work as the first (up to 200 hours and up to \$15,000) is now being recommended by the FLP Steering Committee to the Council for approval. Lucy reminded the Council that Janet is charging half her usual rate for this work. On motion made and seconded, the Council unanimously approved a second contract for up to \$15,000 in fees (200 hours of services).

Status of Canoe Access Project: Al had recently done a site assessment and reported that a canoe site off Rt 2A in Ayer near the old David E. Ross & Associates office (under the powerlines) was not a viable site. It had come to his attention that there was another possible site near the juncture of McPherson and Bishop Roads on Devens North Post that might be suitable. He had visited the site and described it as being adjacent to the abutments of a tank bridge (the Filter Bed Road bridge no longer exists) on Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge land. He will be meeting in the next week or so with representatives from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, Devens Enterprise Commission, Town of Ayer, and others to further discuss the feasibility of developing a canoe access, picnic area, and trailhead.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP): Al provided an update on the status of this rapidly evolving project. At the moment there are about 23 parcels with interested or willing landowners in play representing approximately 2,000 acres, adding that this does not include a portion of the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) Wharton Plantation in Groton or NEFF property in Lancaster, though it is possible the

NEFF properties may be included as the application is finalized. Lucy added that the owners of two larger properties in Harvard, Fruitlands Museum and St. Benedicts Abbey, were not interested in participating in the FLP at this time. Regardless of the loss of larger tracts, Al believes this will be a strong application.

Al reported that current conversations with the Nashoba Conservation Trust indicate the Trust is willing to donate several tracts totaling 140 acres parcel as full cost share. In addition, he is working with Peter Lowitt and Neil Angus of the Devens Enterprise Commission to ascertain if the Lower Cold Spring Brook conservation area can be included in FLP and as another full cost share conservation restriction property.

With the properties to be included firming up, the next step will be continuing to obtain participation letters from the landowners, having the restricted appraisals done, and beginning to write the narrative on each property that will be part of the application. Al reported that Janet has developed an RFP to send to appraisers, combining the properties to be appraised that are in relatively close proximity to each other. For example, the first RFP to have gone out was for properties in the Ashby/Fitchburg area. Given the FLP requires a 25% cost share, Al is hoping all landowners will consider a bargain sale of 25% to meet this requirement.

It should be noted that Al will be away on vacation May 22 – May 31 and then again June 7 -- June 15.

Council Projects Update

Conservation Networking Breakfasts: The next breakfast could be on May 18th but, to date, a speaker has not been secured. A possible suggestion would be to have law enforcement (environmental police and local police) address ATV usage of trails: what is allowed (access for hunting and fishing) and what is not allowed.

Through a grant to the NRWA from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, Martha Morgan has arranged for a series of speakers. Topics include mussels and mapping cold water refugia for trout. While most of the talks are in the evening, the next one, on April 27th, will be in the morning and will be the first of two on mussels: “Enhancing Stream Integrity: Combined Perspectives from Dam Removal to Mussel Conservation,” with special focus on the Nissitissit River”. This talk can do “double-duty” as an NRWA program and a talk of interest to those who typically attend Council Conservation Networking Breakfasts.

Other Business

Hollingsworth & Vose: Martha reported that the comment period on the renewal of the Discharge Permit for H&V runs until April 30th. She has reviewed it, noting she did not find many changes to the existing permit and would support those being proposed.

Mine Falls Dam: Martha reported that the FERC license for Mine Falls Dam in Nashua, NH is also open for comment. The NPS will be commenting on it, as it could impact upward migration of fish to our designated Wild & Scenic rivers. Martha is also reviewing the application and will reach out to colleagues at the US Fish & Wildlife Service for assistance.

The next meeting will be on May 20th at 7 PM by Zoom.